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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 000143

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CEN

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND PRESIDENT LOBO DISCUSS THE NEED TO
APPOINT NEW MILITARY HIGH COMMAND

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Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reason 1.4 (b & d)

11. (S) The Ambassador and President Lobo met for 90 minutes on February 14 at the Residence. While the two discussed a myriad of issues of interest to the bilateral relation (septel), the Ambassador took the opportunity to stress our growing concern of the continued presence and participation in Lobo's government of the regime Minister of Defense Lionel Sevilla and Chief of Defense Romeo Vasquez Velasquez. The Ambassador appreciated the commitments that Lobo had made to appoint new leadership in the political-military hierarchy, an issue that they had discussed on two previous occasions (on January 23 and 29). Nevertheless, the Ambassador said the clock was ticking and that there was no indication of any imminent decision to make the needed personnel changes. The Ambassador stressed that many in the international community, including in Washington, were looking for Lobo to demonstrate his leadership and commitment to restore Honduras fully on the path of democracy. The Ambassador added that a key element was to make clear strong civilian control of the military. The presence of two key members of the Micheletti regime, and their links to the coup, made this a troubling situation in the minds of many inside and outside Honduras.

12. (S) Lobo responded that he remained committed to asserting control of the military. He noted that the military was under great strain and that confusion and uncertainty reigned due to the officers' isolation and the fallout from the June 28 coup. Lobo said he believed that the military had been manipulated by both Zelaya and his opponents on the political right. He wanted to be fair to the military and help it regain its balance. He also expressed concern that the situation in Honduras remained unstable and that potentially he would need the military to help him maintain order in the event that extremists launched a wave of protests. He said he feared that if he acted precipitously, the military might turn against him.

13. (S) The Ambassador agreed that the military had to be treated fairly; but also it was important for him as the Commanding General to be firm and decisive. The Ambassador expressed confidence that the military would follow his strong leadership and direction. The appointment of new leadership would allow the Honduran military to begin the process of looking to the future and turning the page. He

urged the President to appoint a new civilian minister who would be loyal to him and have no ties to the regime. The Ambassador also said it was also critically important for General Vasquez to step down. The Ambassador made clear that the U.S. was not in a position to reengage with the Honduran military and restore military assistance until new leadership was in place.

14. (S) Lobo appreciated the Ambassador's straight forward and honest advice. He admitted that Vasquez was angling to stay on, or be appointed as Minister of Defense. Lobo made clear that he would ensure that Vasquez would step down, but wanted to do it carefully. He said he was under pressure from some within the officer corps to appoint Army Chief General Garcia Padgett. The Ambassador said that the two individuals most closely connected to the military side of the coup were Vasquez and Garcia Padgett. The Ambassador discouraged Lobo from appointing Garcia Padgett. He suggested that Lobo consider appointing General Doblado, a scrupulous and highly respected officer. The Ambassador said Garcia Padgett was a relatively young general and a strong institutional argument could be made in favor of someone like Doblado. Lobo said he planned to meet with the 120 member senior officer corps on February 16 and make the case for the need to change the leadership. He said he would do the right thing with regards to the military and would show the U.S. and the world that he was in control, but said he would not be hasty in making the decision. The Ambassador suggested that Lobo act sooner rather than later since the international community had not yet voiced this concern publicly. If he waited the international public criticism would not be long in coming and he would then be seen as bowing to foreign pressure, which would be worse. Lobo said he would take U.S. views into consideration in making his final decision. He said he

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would ultimately do the right thing.
LLORENS